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WASHDC FOR DCHA/OFDA, EUR/CACEN (JMUDGE)

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DECLARES COLD AND SNOW DISASTER IN KAZAKHSTAN

1. Summary and Action Request: Following severe storms that have led to a winter emergency in the south of Kazakhstan, Ambassador Ordway has declared a cold and snow disaster in three oblasts in Kazakhstan (Zhambyl Oblast, Karagandy Oblast and Southern Kazakhstan Oblast.) The Ambassador and Acting USAID Regional Mission Director request that DCHA/OFDA immediately commit USD 25,000 to provide clothing, electric heaters, and window seals to mitigate the effects of extreme cold (minus 30 Celsius) and snow (over 2 meters) in the affected areas. End Summary

2. The Red Crescent Society reports that starting at the beginning of this month, on or about 2 February 2005, and continuing for approximately two weeks, the three oblasts experienced extraordinary amounts of snowfall coupled with unusually low temperatures. Due to excessive snow (in some areas over two meters deep) and cold (up to minus 30 degrees Celsius), roofs of buildings and houses have collapsed and central heating systems have failed, with the result of exposing people in these areas to hypothermia.

3. The Red Crescent Society estimates that over 700 buildings have been damaged in the three oblasts. More than 650 settlements or towns have been cut off from oblast centers as a result of the cold and snow. The Red Crescent Society believes that over 60 percent of the population in Zhambyl Oblast has been adversely affected by the unusual weather patterns in February; 30 percent of the population of Southern Kazakhstan Oblast has similarly been affected; and over 70 percent of the town of Shakhtinsk in Karagandy Oblast has suffered from the sub-freezing cold and snow. Overall, the damage from this disaster is estimated to be approximately USD 32.8 million according to the Red Crescent Society.

4. Local governments and branches of the Red Crescent Society have provided initial relief to those most severely affected by the snow and cold. At this point, the resources of these organizations are becoming exhausted. Yet there remain vulnerable members of these communities who still need assistance. These include the elderly, large family households, families with children, and the handicapped or physically disabled. At present, local governments and aid agencies cannot sufficiently address the immediate needs of these populations.

5. The governments of Zhambyl Oblast and the city of Shakhtinsk have appealed to the Red Crescent Society for assistance with this disaster. During the week of February 14, the Ambassador Ordway made a trip to Shymkent, in the Southern Kazakhstan Oblast, one of the three areas affected by the extreme snow and cold. He saw first-hand that the need is real and the emergency is a severe one.

6. The most immediate need is to provide warmth in the remaining structures where affected populations are sheltering. The Embassy has been approached by the Red Crescent Society with a proposal to provide warm clothes and materials/equipment. The intended use of this disaster request will be to purchase the following items in order to provide immediate relief to an estimated 1,000 families (or approximately 3,560 people):

1,000 sets of warm clothing
500 electric space heaters
1,000 units of window seals

7. The Embassy provided funding to the Red Crescent Society for a similar snow emergency in 1999. Based on this experience, we are confident this non-governmental organization will efficiently render assistance to the population in these three, hard-hit oblasts. The Mission requests approval of this request in an expedited manner so that our assistance can be provided on a timely basis to those most in need.

Asquino

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